



**Testimony to the Children's Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly**

February 27, 2017

**Testimony in support of H.B. 5185**

Honorable Chairs and Members of the Children's Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

We, Connecticut Students for a Dream, call on the members of the Children's Committee to pass and vote favorably on HB 5185, AN CONCERNING SPECIAL IMMIGRANT JUVENILE STATUS. This bill would allow youth to be able to file for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) up to the age of twenty-one instead of the current eighteen years old, which is limited by the state's definition of a minor child.

C4D is a statewide youth-led network fighting for the rights of undocumented youth and their families. We do this through community organizing, leadership development, and advocacy. We are proud to be the only organization in Connecticut that is led by and for immigrant youth directly impacted by the issues we seek to address. Our organization is made up of our members and leaders, who are high school aged, college aged, and young adults from the entire state of Connecticut.

Based on interactions with many students around the state and the experiences of our members, Connecticut Students for a Dream sees this bill as essential to help protect some of the state's most vulnerable immigrant youth. Children and youth that qualify for SIJS are fleeing violence from their country of origin and have been abandoned or are no longer connected to their parents and family.

HB 5185 would allow Connecticut to fully implement the intent of the federal law seeking to protect vulnerable abused and neglected immigrant youth under Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJ). Discrepancies in the age of a minor child between CT law and federal law prevents youth between the ages of 18-21 from obtaining the state court findings that are necessary for them to be able to apply to the existing Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJ). Federal statutes already extend this benefit to those up to the age of 21 but the state's definition of a minor child limits this benefit to those under the age of 18. This is leaving many youth out that could potentially qualify.

The obstacles and difficulties there youth face are extreme and unimaginable to most of us, and this age limitation that is inconsistent with federal law adds an additional and unnecessary barrier. In our work as an organization, we have heard many stories of and spoken to young people who have fled from their home countries by themselves and became unaccompanied minors entering the United States. These are youth that have lost contact with one or both of their parents, youth that do not know anything about the system when they get to this country. Many times these youth do not have access to basic services, let alone an experienced immigration attorney, because they do not have an adult present to guide them. This means that many youth do not find out they qualify for SIJS until they are already over 18 and it is too late to apply under the current process in CT.

By making this small change, Connecticut has an opportunity to give these youth a change at a future. It is heartbreaking for these youth to have gone through so much only to miss their chance of fixing their status by a few months, when it doesn't need to be this way

We urge the committee to vote favorably on HB5185

Camila Bortolletto  
CT Students for a Dream

